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13. Sport and the Media

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OVERVIEW

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WHY MEDIA SPORT MATTERS

The media are so ubiquitous and familiar that we can often forget how integral they are to our everyday life. Whether it is our consumption of mass media and communications, browsing the web, accessing information via our mobile phones or interacting with multimedia content via gaming consoles, our personal and professional lives are touched on a daily basis by media technologies in one way or another. Media sport is similarly ubiquitous and everyday, particularly the circulation of sports news which incessantly fills the bulletins of 24/7 rolling news agencies, broadcasters, online newspapers and social media. Precisely how we make sense of this proliferation of media sport and why it matters for our understanding of sport in society is the purpose of this chapter.

In their Forward Look report on *Media and Europe* for the European Science Foundation, media researchers from across Europe attempt to map out the common European agenda in media and communications research for the next five to ten years (ESF, 2014). This is a daunting task, but they manage to identify and define some key research questions and recommendations for the field, at the same time raising awareness of the importance of media research in the academy and beyond.

The dominant themes in the report focus on the social and political issues created by transformations in digital technologies, telecommunications and the Internet under the following headings:

- Political engagement in an age of mediatisation
- What is the 'Digital Divide' and why is it important?
- Content creation and the creative industries: new practices with economic consequences
- Identity-formation: From Facebook groups to institutional forms of cultural heritage

The four areas of critical inquiry are instructive for thinking about the ways in which digital media and communication technologies are transforming the inter-relationships between sport and the media. The role of the media in enabling or blocking engagement with sport leads us to ask a series of questions:

- What kinds of participation and power sharing take place in digital media sport?
- What is the relative impact of technological innovation in shaping the uses of digitally networked media sport in different socio-economic contexts?
- How have recent transformations in media sport destabilised traditional identities associated with sport, and what potential is there for transnational identities amid increasing global media sport flows?
- What is the relationship between cultural production and consumption of media sport, and how has the role of sports audiences as producers of media content changed the practices of media sport?

Such questions present a challenge to media and communication research as it continues to grapple with the impact of three overarching processes of digitisation, globalisation and commodification of communication technologies and practices. All three processes inform and motivate academic research on the media, not least because they have had a profound influence on how media are produced, distributed and consumed.

Briefly, digitisation is a process that has made media sport more malleable, networked, mobile, interactive and converged across different technological platforms. The movement from 'atoms' to 'bits' (analogue to digital) has transformed the media in profound ways, but arguably the long-term impact of this process on society and culture remains uncertain.

Globalisation, the sociological buzzword of the nineties, remains a complex and contradictory process, or set of processes, that involve multi-directional flows of information, people and materials. This increasing liquidity of relations and structures has also changed the nature of media sport, a process that arguably began in the late-nineteenth century with the formation of international sport, such as the modern Olympic movement, but entered a new phase of expansion in the 1960's with the development of live satellite feeds from sport, and was more radically transformed with the development of the Internet.

Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century the scale, scope and speed of globalisation and its influence on the social and cultural realities of sport have been unremitting and profound. Sport under modernity has moved

from local organisation around shared enthusiasms to global media sport, which is fashioned by transnational corporate interests of governing bodies, sponsors and media organisations (Rowe, 2011). In the context of sport, the transnational flow of televised sport has been one of the primary drivers of globalisation (Horne, 2006). Processes such as the international sale of rights to television sport, the increasing scale of international sporting competitions and the global consumption of sport through niche, digitised, networked and mobile media forms represent just some of the key indicators of what can be characterised as 'global media sport' (Rowe, 2011).

The phenomena of global media sport has attracted an increasing amount of sociological and media study, motivated, not least, by a desire to build our knowledge and clarify our understanding of globalisation and its impact on sport as a popular cultural form (Maguire, 2011). One important realisation of research on the topic has been the acceptance that globalisation is not a linear process, and has differential impacts on sport, cultures and societies. The primary theoretical lacunae for understanding globalisation and sport has been to investigate the compression of sporting forms, focusing on the material and symbolic interconnectedness and interdependence of the world, variously explained through processes of homogenisation, Westernisation and Americanisation (Maguire, 2011).

The increasing presence of 'global media sport' links to the third process influencing media and social trends, commodification. The political economy of media sport is heavily aligned with the resilience of capitalism and associated

material and symbolic conditions of wealth and power. The contemporary sports media complex – which characterises the multiplicity of interconnected social, economic and cultural relations of sport – has become an important domain in which to observe how and why societies are socialised in to capitalist modes of production and consumption. Mainstream media celebrate the rationalisation, specialisation, measurement and sale of sport, and are now heavily integrated in to the organisational fabric of sport.

However, it is too easy to be overly instrumentalist about the potency of such relationships. In the era of networked media sport there are constraints on the commodification of sport – some of which comes from resistance and defence of particular sporting traditions, which were formed in previous eras of sports culture, some of which perhaps ironically, evolved in the upper-middle class roots of Victorian sport and ideals of amateurism. Unpacking these complexities is the challenge of contemporary critiques of media sport.

Media sport can help us understand and learn more about all these processes. For example, the rise of what the Australian academics Brett Hutchins and David Rowe (2012) have defined as ‘networked media sport’, provides a knowledge and understanding not only of the transformations in media sport – its unpredictability, instability and unanticipated synthesis - but also of socio-cultural change more widely, which ‘networked media sport’ both reflects and contributes to in influential ways. One only has to think about the rise of online, mobile and interactive betting around sport, to appreciate how digitisation,

globalisation and commodification in media sport have broader resonances for sport in society.

This conceptual mapping of where media and communications studies are currently being focused, and the place of media sport within this academic inquiry, brings us to looking at the specific empirical evidence of what is happening in the contemporary world of media sport, and its continuities and changes with the past.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MEDIA SPORT

Nationalism is just one aspect of meaning making in sport. But the meaning of contemporary sport, especially at the elite level, is also increasingly tied up with money – that is the imperatives of late-capitalism to generate large profits for financial stakeholders in sport.

As economic historians of sport have shown (Vamplew, 1988), the commercial imperatives of sport have a longer history than many would credit. Sport's relationship with the media has a similar longevity, and the two great wings of twentieth century popular entertainment have grown hand in hand. What is different in today's incarnation of media sport is the scale and scope of commercialisation, which is increasingly ubiquitous. All areas of sport are subject to professionalisation, rationalisation and commodification. All costs and benefits are accounted for. Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first

century the scale, scope and speed of globalisation and its influence on the social and cultural realities of sport have been unremitting and profound. Sport has moved from local organisation around shared enthusiasms to global media sport, which is fashioned by transnational corporate interests of governing bodies, sponsors and media organisations (Rowe, 2011).

As we have seen in the sports such as cricket, with the development of the Twenty20 format, the transnational flow of televised sport has been one of the primary drivers of globalisation in sport and popular culture more broadly (Horne, 2007). Processes such as the international sale of rights to television sport, the increasing scale of international sporting competitions and the global consumption of sport through niche, digitised, networked and increasingly mobile media forms represent just some of the key indicators of what can be characterised as 'global media sport' (Rowe, 2011). The phenomena of global media sport has attracted an increasing amount of sociological and media study, motivated, not least, by a desire to build our knowledge and clarify our critical understanding of globalisation and its impact on sport as a popular cultural form (Maguire, 2011; Giulianotti and Robertson, 2007).

English football went through a profound transformation during the 1990's, primarily due to the increased competition for television rights in response to the evolution of niche, multi-channel, pay-television. The rise of the English Premier League has been the focus of a number of critical sociological and media studies, which have identified the social, economic and cultural dynamics of late-

modernity (Williams, 1994; King, 2003; Sandvoss, 2003; and Boyle and Haynes, 2004).

Football in its new configuration is characterised by increased consumerism and globalisation, particularly of leading club brands. All of these transformative processes have made football beholden to the commercial drivers of neo-liberal market economics and individualism – just witness the enormous salaries now enjoyed by the EPL elite. The dramatic transformation of many British stadiums and the drive to commodify not only the match-day experience, but also the broader mediatisation of the sport has, at the same time, disenfranchised many supporters who have made their fandom the site of vigorous cultural politics and activism (for example, the anti-Glazer campaign by Manchester United fans (Millward, 2013)).

A crucial dynamic to the historic rationale for the EPL has been a more expansive contract with television, specifically BSkyB, which handed over more control and commercial incentives to the satellite company to select matches for live transmission and dictate the timing and scope of the coverage. As Table 1 illustrates, successive rights deals have ratcheted up the value of television income to the EPL, prompted by new competitors to BSkyB's dominance (which have included NTL, ITV Digital, Setanta, ESPN and now BT) and an expansionist strategy to sell the EPL brand and its TV rights on a global scale.

Table 1 about here

Renewed deals for televised coverage of the seasons 2013-14 to 2015-16 were estimated to be worth more than £5.5 billion, with the domestic live TV rights alone worth more than £3 billion, representing a seventy per cent increase in value from the previous deal. With so much money at stake, the heightened competition to maintain a position in the EPL has increased the investment and financial risk many clubs are prepared to engage in. This has materialised in two significant flows in capital and operational control:

- 1) International private investment in club ownership by wealthy individuals, consortia and venture capitalists.
- 2) The global distribution of television rights to the English Premier League and English club brands.

At the start of the 2013-14 season, half of the clubs in the Premier League had international owners (Table 2).

Table 2 about here

The EPL is therefore not simply a football competition that entertains and showcases some of the world's best footballers. It is a high-end, commercially intensive industry, which has attracted investment for capital gain on a global scale, even where its impresarios are motivated by their own vanity and ego. Most of the investments in EPL clubs are conscious interventions by global elites whose wealth stems from much broader, unrelated, capitalist enterprises and their focus in owning a football club represents a diversification of their commercial interests born of a unification of the EPL as a 'rich man's playground'

with high prestige and cultural kudos among the elite trans-national capitalist class to which they belong.

The sale of television rights around the world has radically extended the commercial value of English football and has underwritten the growth in popularity of the EPL and especially its leading clubs whose brands have global reach. Although some of the reported figures for global fan bases are at times marketing fancy, there can be little dispute that more people are watching English football since the expansion of television rights sales from the mid-2000's. Table 3 below illustrates the scale of this expansion and the surges in valuation of television rights deals in some regions from 2010 to 2013.

Table 3 about here

The structural changes in English football reflect some of the well-recognised traits of globalisation: transnational flows of capital, the international migration of labour and socio-cultural homogenisation created by transnational communications and the resultant intensification of a global consciousness (Robertson, 1992).

By far the largest investment in English clubs has come from the Arab Gulf. Investment in football is part of a broader interdependence of various international agencies of sport with the region, and its growing influence in global cultural and entertainment industries. The mutual capital interests of Arab Gulf States and the western world has largely depended on hydrocarbons, however this has increasingly migrated to other areas of global capitalism

including service industries such as tourism (Hvidt, 2012) and sport (Scharfenort, 2012). Investment in areas such as motor sport and golf in the United Arab Emirates and the successful bid for the 2022 FIFA World Cup by Qatar are more obvious manifestations of post-oil Gulf economies.

More generally, sport is the cornerstone of 'soft power' politics in the region, where sport becomes a diplomatic tool for international goodwill and political agency (Grix and Lee, 2013). There are political risks to such strategies, as 'soft power' requires an openness and transparency that some Gulf states are reluctant to fully engage in. The award of hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup to Qatar has led to the disclosure of human rights abuses regarding migrant workers, as well as allegations of corruption in the bidding process.

From the 2013-14 season the Qatar-based television channel Al Jazeera won the rights to broadcast all 380 games of the English Premier League across the Middle East and North Africa, for an undisclosed sum believed to be close to £400million. Growth of interest in English football, in particular the brands of Chelsea, Manchester City and Manchester United, are extremely strong and their match reports regularly appear in Arab Gulf newspapers.

Such developments are part of a process that some have identified as a wider shift in economic power in sport away from its Euro-American centre (Horton, 2012). In football, the locus of power remains in Europe, but the economic influence of emerging markets outside Europe, capital flows from East to West and cultural flows of long-established football brands from West to East, means

that the sport is being shaped by new transnational forces. English football stadiums now bare the name of Gulf-based corporate sponsors, including the Etihad Stadium in Manchester and the Emirates Stadium of Arsenal, both sponsored by airlines beckoning European travellers to the UAE as a luxury tourist destination. These multivariate flows are certainly identifiable as globalisation but precisely how this works, and in whose interests, will continue to require specific empirical research to trace the precise nature of the global relationships within sport and the media, as well as push forward our conceptual understanding of this phenomenon.

REPRESENTATION AND MEANING IN MEDIA SPORT

The point about football in Britain is that it is not just a sport people take to, like cricket or tennis. It is built into the urban psyche, as much a common experience to our children as are uncles and school. It is not a phenomenon: it is an everyday matter. There is more eccentricity in deliberately disregarding it than in devoting a life to it. It has more significance in the national character than theatre has. Its sudden withdrawal from the people would bring deeper disconsolation than to deprive them of television. The way we play the game, organize it and reward it reflects the kind of community we are.
(Hopcraft, 1967: 1)

Journalist and scriptwriter Hopcraft has been widely cited, and for good reason. It evocatively captures the values and meaning of football in British society throughout the post-war decades.

Hopcraft was writing in a period of change both in society and culture. Central to the changing times of the late-1960's was the social importance of television.

Published in 1968, when the UK had just introduced colour television licenses, *The Football Man* reflected on the meaning of the sport, which lifted the working class out of the drudgery of life in a game they had claimed as their own. The gender blindness in both the title and content of the book reflects the social and cultural context of football in this era, but more remarkably when we look at modern football, reflects the endurance of particular divisive discourses in the game which have perpetuated and consolidated universal gender divisions in the sport.

Hopcraft later conceded that his quote about the removal of football from people's lives might now be replaced by television – as this was the medium through which most people engaged with the world, and indeed, sport. In thinking about the meaning of sport, it is worth keeping in mind Garry Whannel's observations that for most people, most of the time, sport means televised sport (Whannel, 1992). It captures a central aspect of the relationship between sport and the media – that our knowledge and understanding of contemporary sport is reflected and refracted through our consumption of sport in the media, especially television.

Whannel's analysis of televised sport in the early 1990's carries a similar resonance to Hopcraft's in that it reflects the time in which it was written. In today's digital, mobile and convergent world of media, we might want to suggest that for most people, most of the time, sport means televised sport on multiple screens, in multiple locations and with a hinterland of multiple sites of information, conversation and reuse. In other words, collective meaning of sport

is more dispersed, and less certain, in the sense of a shared experience and culture.

Why is this important? Studying the media is largely about meaning and understanding the complexities of how meaning is constructed and circulated in society – media sport is key for meaning in many people’s lives, and these meanings are often differentiated by a range of social factors including age, gender, ethnicity, nation, region, and other more discreet demographics. How media sport represents these identities both in, and in response to, sporting practices opens up important contexts in which to understand how the media functions, in terms of production practices, how its messages are constructed, and how audiences receive and interpret such messages. One field of analysis that has grown within the study of media and sport is the focus on the construction of national sporting narratives, and it is to this field of inquiry we now turn.

National Sporting Narratives

Media narratives of international and Olympic sport are now well established (Rowe et al, 1998; Poulton, 2004; Billings, 2008; Vincent and Hill, 2013). Although the Internet has effectively made all mass media global, media sport essentially maps on to national boundaries and modes of national address. There are four ways of conceptualising how the production, distribution and consumption of media sport connects with the values of nationhood:

- *Sport and the media share socially and culturally constructed historical bonds, which are specific to each national media environment.* Here we see what Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) identified as the ‘invention of tradition’: where rituals and symbols of the nation have been celebrated, developed and consolidated by the press and broadcasters who by repetition of a ‘national sporting calendar’ create norms and values which are connected with the past. For example, the annual coverage of events such as the Grand National horse race from Aintree, tennis from Wimbledon and the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race form part of the valued British sporting traditions which are annually covered and celebrated by the media.
- *Sport and the media combine to create shared national identities among readers, listeners and viewers.* The media’s coverage of national sporting events such as the Olympic Games or the Rugby World Cup help construct an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983) which creates a deep and shared comradeship among readers, listeners and viewers through sport. Sports journalists and broadcasters both share and help construct such national values, and act as representatives of ‘the nation’ during major international competitions.
- *In spite of global and transnational communications, sport and the media continue to be bounded by national geographical structures and cultures.* By and large, media sport maps on to media territories, and creates what Karl Deutsch (1966) called a ‘national communicative space’. The mass

media are both regulated by public authorities (for example, the listed events of televised national sporting events) and commercially distinguished by national markets. Even where media sports are transnational, the rights to televise events are usually distributed within a national context, for example the UEFA Champions League is a pan-European event which is televised for national audiences.

- *Sport and the media continually remind their audiences of the nation on an everyday basis.* Media sport is part of everyday popular culture and contributes to the construction of 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995). By the daily reminder of national competitions and leagues – The English Premier League or the Scottish Cup - the nation is 'flagged' on a daily basis.

One of the key practices in the construction of the media's narrative on sport is sports commentary, which has grown as a distinctive field of broadcasting practice and institutionalised form of broadcast talk. By way of exploring the importance of commentary in framing our understanding of media sport we can review a recent example, which, because of its character, led to a wider public debate on the practice of commentary, particularly focusing on the integrity of commentary at the BBC, once held up as the standard bearer of sports broadcasting.

During the BBC's live coverage of the Sochi Winter Olympic Games in 2014, alpine commentary team Tim Warwood and Ed Leigh were joined by snowboard

teammate Amy Fuller to cover the Women's Slopestyle Snowboarding final which included the British athlete Jenny Jones. As the competition neared its conclusion Jones completed her second and final run to the whoops and hollers of the commentators, whose narrative of the run included phrases such as 'Go on Jones'; 'Beautiful'; and 'Solid'. The commentary also included a sexual innuendo during the wait for Jones score to be announced, with Leigh exclaiming: 'I can feel my pulse in my lower intestine'. To which Warwood replied: 'That's not your pulse, Ed'. When the Austrian snowboarder, Anna Gasser, fell back on her board, effectively eliminating her from medal contention, the commentators whooped with joy at Jones securing Britain's first ever Olympic alpine medal.

The Jenny Jones commentary drew more than 300 complaints from BBC viewers, some of whom branded Leigh, Warwood and Fuller as 'hyperactive' and 'infantile'. For its part the BBC accepted that the 'excitement got the better' of the commentators, but took no further action. The lack of impartiality drew scathing criticism in a number of British newspapers. Oliver Brown (2014) in the *Daily Telegraph* argued that the Corporation's patriotic fervor had tipped over into zealotry: 'The paroxysm of partisanship that defines the BBC's coverage of the Winter Olympics', he suggested, 'has created a sense, perhaps unfairly, of being condescended to by a legion of sophomoric cheerleaders'. He concluded, 'By all means, BBC, keep the passion. But we beg of you, just keep it classy'. Similarly, Neil Squires (2014) in the *Daily Express* affirmed: 'Lord Reith would have been turning in his grave at the giddy double act running wild'.

There were several others who questioned the departure from the Rethian principles of impartiality and balance that still run deep in the BBC's news values. Stuart Heritage (2014) in *The Guardian* was in agreement about the nature of the commentary, but had a slightly different take on its meaning:

To hear them, you'd think you were hearing a handful of unemployed children's entertainers, driven berserk by lack of work, who'd been pinned down and forced-fed a lethal mixture of blue Smarties and decade old-fermented Sunny Delight concentrate syrup against their will moments before they went on air. Hyperactive wasn't the word.

Heritage goes on to explain how the commentators had cheered as an Austrian snowboarder fell, and therefore ensured a bronze medal for Jones. But unlike his sports journalism colleagues, Heritage concluded: 'It was brilliant!'

One question we might ask of the commentary was whether or not it really deviated from the time honored traditions of commentary viewers had come to expect from the BBC? If we strip away the vocabulary of a modern, trendy sport such as snowboarding, and look at what was said and why, can we argue that the commentary team actually continued a long-tradition of 'cheerleading' and 'patriotism' we have seen on British TV for many years?

Throughout its history the BBC has developed a set of general principals of commentary, many of which have their origin in radio in the 1930's which were then appropriated in to the pioneering era of television outside broadcasting in

the immediate post-War era (Haynes, 2009). Although there is no 'ideal' type of commentary, as a general rule, television commentary must add to the picture, unlike radio commentary, which must convey what is happening on the field of play. Another key feature of commentary is building suspense, perhaps by focusing on the expected form of an athlete, building to critical moments in the action and inducing viewers to identify and even take sides with a particular athlete or team. This last aspect is qualified by a need for balance and fairness, or as it has become known in the BBC, impartiality, but during international sport the convention has always been to support the national ambitions.

The Jones commentary certainly played heavily on suspense: would she or wouldn't she win a medal? It also, arguably, asked the audience to take sides through patriotic sentiment, and the partiality was validated by the closeness of the commentary team to the athlete. It may well have fallen foul of the need for fairness, by celebrating the failure of an Austrian snowboarder, but it could be argued this was 'suitably excused' because of the wider meaning of the first British medal in an Olympic alpine event. Although heavily criticised, many thousands defended the commentators on Twitter, who were applauded for adding emotional and entertainment value.

National audiences prefer a patriotic mode of address. The BBC's coverage of the recent Winter Games in Sochi provides evidence of how broadcasters go about building national stories based on key athletes and events, which are connected to national prestige. Through the BBC's coverage we all know a little bit more about 'the hammer' in curling, 'backside fakie's' in snowboarding and the

research and development that goes in to the aerodynamics of sliding on the skeleton. The BBC coverage of the snowboarding celebrated the culture of the sport, eschewing more formal approaches, but keeping within a long tradition of cheering on British athletes which commentators like David Coleman, Harry Carpenter, Barry Davies and many others have done before them. The social media response to the event and this particular commentary bares this out. The overwhelming response was positive and supportive of the commentary team and its frivolity.

Cheerleaders with microphones?

For many years British sports commentators were synonymous with particular sports and built a rapport with the athletes they narrated on. The boxing commentator Harry Carpenter first gained public notoriety for his interviews with Mohammad Ali in the early 1960's, but it was his on-screen relationship with British Heavyweight boxer Frank Bruno that brought him wider public acclaim. Bruno's post-fight interviews with Carpenter soon produced the catchphrase "Know what I mean 'Arry?" During Bruno's world title fight with Mike Tyson in 1989, after the British boxer landed a left hook that rocked the American, Carpenter famously yelled "Come on Frank!" uncommonly breaking his usual impartiality. The professional ideology of impartial reporting on sport is not universal, and indeed is arguably peculiar in the world of international sports broadcasting. Most commentators or announcers reveal their true colours when major international sporting tournaments come round, and this is mainly due to their national cultural association with the audience. Some national audiences accept more extreme bias than others, most notably the long bellowing shouts of 'Gooooaalll' by some football commentators. Extreme forms of biased commentary are therefore very public expressions of national identity that tap into deeper affective relationships and feelings of nationhood around sport.

Meaning in media sport, and processes of media representation, are heavily tied to constructions of identity, and social media has added a new layer of communication of major sports events where the meaning of what we might call 'sporting nationalism' (Bairner, 2001) is interpreted and negotiated from diverse positions. Broadcasters, by and large, do try to stick to the impartiality mode of address, but what about the press coverage of international sport?

Nationalist discourses in the sports press have been well researched, particularly the patriotism surrounding international football. Crolley and Hand (2002) examined the European print media's coverage of football to illustrate the ways in which, for both linguistic and commercial reasons, the sports press of different nations construct national, regional and group identities around the game. Such constructions are defined, redefined and contested in the sporting press and frequently use the rhetorical device of 'us versus them' to orientate both nationalist excitement and interest around particular individuals, teams and events. More recent studies of sporting nationalism, such as Ytterstad's analysis of Norwegian football blogs, reveal the complexity of how representations of the nation may become a space for contestation in the 'blogosphere', particularly given the global dynamics of communications via the Internet and the critical space opened up by the practice of blogging itself (Ytterstad, 2013). How the media sport environment adapts to the national and global dynamics of the Internet can create fascinating contradictions and conflicts in how media sport is produced, distributed and consumed.

The dramatic conclusion to the 2014 Rugby Union Six Nations Championship produced an interesting, and somewhat schizophrenic, example of how UK national papers construct match reports and headlines for different national audiences within the UK and Ireland. By the final weekend of the competition France, Ireland and England each had the potential to win the Six Nations Trophy. England's victory against Italy in their final match meant Ireland needed to win against France in Paris to be champions. In a nail-biting finale Ireland completed a narrow victory, after the French had missed two late opportunities

to win the match. The following day saw the national newspaper *The Sunday Times* produce four different editorials for readers in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland.

The Irish edition of the sports supplement carried the celebratory headline 'LAST ACTION HERO' with an image of the retiring Brian O'Driscoll holding the trophy aloft and a small inset of a 'selfie' of the team crowding in around the mobile phone image. The English editorial of the supplement took a quite different take on the series of events. An image of members of the England squad dressed in 'black-tie' and appearing to be watching the France v Ireland match from a hotel lobby, carried the headline 'Sacre Bleu' with the strap line, 'England denied as France gift Six Nations crown to O'Driscoll'. As an image of England players holding their heads conveyed their disappointment, the clear insinuation of the article was that the French should have won to give England the Championship. The Welsh and Scottish editions focused on the game between the two nations, with minimal reference to Ireland's championship winning performance.

The Sunday Times, like other UK titles has used national editorials around sport for some time, for the obvious commercial reason that local audiences want to read a Scots, Irish, Welsh or English view. But in the age of the Internet, all editions are now open season, and comparisons of the editorial spin in each nation will be made. This is especially so in social media, which is where the story of the different take on the weekend began and gaining traction in to the wider public sphere in the Irish media, including the *Irish Times* which lambasted the editorial line of the London edition.

Meaning in media sport, then, is heavily tied in to constructions of identity, and social media has added a new layer of communication of major sports events where the meaning of what we might call 'sporting nationalism' is interpreted and negotiated from diverse positions.

SPORT JOURNALISM AND ISSUES OF COMMUNICATIONS

POWER

The issue of power, who has it and over whom, is a common theme across the social sciences and arts and humanities. In media sport it plays itself through in a myriad of ways, which as I have suggested, at times centre on issues related to the cultural politics of identity, and on other occasions relate to the political economy of sport and the media. Media sport is not often associated with issues of political engagement, indeed the forced separation of sport and politics has long been a mantra of sporting elites and administrators who want to keep sport as a sacred apolitical site of fun and entertainment. However, as the Winter Games in Sochi illustrated decoupling sport from politics is fanciful. How the conflation of sport and politics happens has everything to do with the media and modern political communications. Indeed, it might be argued that sport itself can become a form of political communication around issues of the nation and nationhood.

What we can recognise in such contexts, is that media sport can be empowering in interesting and unexpected ways. Fan campaigns in protest at unruly owners or battles against discrimination because of differences in gender, ethnicity or sexuality, reveal a different order of political engagement which increasingly organise and operate through social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter. For example, when a banana was thrown in a racist gesture at the Barcelona footballer Dani Alves, who immediately picked it up and took a bite in defiance, high profile international footballers such as Sergio Aguero and Neymar turned to social media to post images of them eating bananas as a symbol of allegiance against racism in the sport. Such direct actions in social media represents a new departure in sport stars taking proactive control of their communications for wider social or political reasons, in the context of a constantly evolving battle against racism in the sport and negative representations of ethnic diversity in sport more broadly (Farrington et al, 2012).

A recent feminist media study on female experiences in online football forums by Deirdre Hynes and Ann-Marie Cook (2013) illustrates how the heavily masculinised character of football culture can be changed and challenged by women in online forums. This space for political struggle in media sport has opened up partly because the online self is presented as 'bodiless and genderless', but also because the symbolic challenge to masculine hegemony in sport happens from behind the safety of a screen. Therefore, for some women, the ability to 'mask' their identities and 'perform' what Hynes (2012: 202) has termed a 'neutral gender position' in online fan forums is central to their ability

to engage in hyper-masculinised media sport contexts. As Hynes notes from her analysis of female fan behaviour in online forums, assimilation in to a male-dominated domain such as football requires 'a stifling of the characteristics of femininity' (Hynes, 2012: 203). This 'drawing back' from femininity remains problematic for broader challenges to women's inclusion in sport, but there are at least signs that the relative power negotiated in online media sport can provide opportunities for negotiating gender imbalances.

In my final analysis, I want to return to media sport practice, particularly the place of sports journalism, to focus on what the Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells has conceptualised as 'communication power', which is partly premised on the intermingling of the old and new powers of media and communication technologies, as well as the rise of what he terms 'mass self-communication'. The rise of technologies such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter has transformed the nature of journalism in some profound ways. For Jeff Jarvis, Professor of Journalism at New York University, and author of *What Would Google Do?*, one of the key ways of understanding these changes is to acknowledge that the process of news journalism has become the product (Jarvis, 2011). This idea alludes to some important shifts not only in the practice of journalism, but also in the communication process itself, of how and why journalists do their work.

Jarvis's theory of process journalism alludes to a wider discussion in journalism theory and practice about the impact of social media on the journalism profession; in particular, the rising importance, influence and impact Twitter is having on the origin, construction, meaning, circulation and consumption of

news. One of the big ideas in Jarvis's book is that journalism now has a 'beta' function – the testing ground for news in process rather than news as an end product. What news in social media is often saying is this is incomplete or imperfect news.

In many ways we have become used to seeing this in the 24/7 news cycle, such as Sky Sports News, as news channels move with the flow of news production through any given day. However, what we are witnessing with Twitter is a far faster and prosaic construction of the news agenda which at times overruns the journalist, and may even make them redundant in the formation of opinion and analysis of events – which may be based on rumour, hearsay or falsehoods. For their part, sports journalists are expected to be adaptable to the changing media environment. They must be adept enough to work across different media, producing copy for print and online versions of the publications they work for, as well as producing blogs, tweets and podcasts or appearing on radio and television when required.

Nevertheless, the polymedia voice of the sports journalist is now challenged in the broader 'conversations' that now take place around sport in the participatory culture of social networks. Networked media sport is essentially a challenge to their gatekeeper role, and their communication power. This challenge comes from fans, bloggers, tweeters and, increasingly, those from within sport itself – the sports star who may be one or all of the former. The sports star as producer of 'self-mass communication' represents a particular form of disintermediation, the cutting out of the journalist as intermediary, which has destabilised the

news-source relationships in sport that for many years were characterised by the 'beat' reporting of old, and more latterly have been replaced by professionally managed media relations (Boyle and Haynes, 2011).

Networked media sport represents a different order of mass self-communication, lying outside mainstream media organisations, which circumvents the need for athletes to connect with their audience via journalists. As Donsbach (2011: 43) has suggested, the threat to the identity of journalists is a problem of 'a disappearing social function' of journalism, where access to information no longer resides with the occupation of journalists. This is compounded by:

- The endemic global decline of newspaper circulations;
- Search engines and their algorithms providing our hierarchy of news;
- The personalisation of distribution and aggregation of sports news that we order, read, compile and connect with by those we identify and trust as our friends and those that we follow.
- The heightened competition for attention in a global, multimedia, networked world of communication;
- 'Churnalism', where press releases are used verbatim as news stories, has profound consequences for sports journalism. Sport now sits squarely at the centre of the entertainment industries and is heavily influenced by both the economics of the media (television especially) and the cult of celebrity that drives the fascination and populist interest in sport stars.

These processes have several consequences for how sport stars behave online:

- Social media are used as an extension of an athlete's marketing activities and behavior, which begs the question: when does public endorsement end and private comment begin?
- The scale of fan support can be used as indicators of popularity; a form of symbolic capital that can potentially have tangible economic rewards through endorsements.
- Sport stars use social media platforms to extend the PR activity that has been played out traditionally through newspapers and television, often with the objective of shaping opinion or setting news agendas.
- There are increasing instances of a conflict of interest between the individual sport star and sports organisation they represent.

The issues raised by social media and sport

The anonymity afforded by social media means it can offer a platform for abuse, rather than conversation. A number of high profile sports stars have closed Twitter accounts due to the level of abuse (often racist or sexist) that they have been subject to. It was reported in 2012 for example that Manchester City's England international Micah Richards, had closed his account as a result of the level of racial abuse directed at the footballer. In March 2012, a Welsh student was sentenced to 56 days in prison for making a racist comment about the critically ill Bolton Wanderers footballer Fabrice Muamba, via a social networking site. In 2014 former footballer and TalkSport commentator, Stan Collymore, deleted his Twitter account when he spoke out about 'trolling', only to receive abuse himself for being a hypocrite by a former partner Ulrika Jonsson. In Scotland, police prosecuted supporters found posting sectarian abuse on social networks such as Facebook. When David Craig – one of three high profile cases in late 2011 and early 2012 - was found guilty of posting sectarian abuse aimed at Celtic manager Neil Lennon (including calling for the Celtic manager to be shot), his defense was that it was 'simply banter' that goes on between football fans of Celtic and Rangers. Such has been the political and public profile of online sectarian-related abuse, new legislation was introduced by the Scottish Government to strengthen the power of the police and the courts. The Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications

(Scotland) Act 2012 sees possible jail sentences of up to 5 years for those convicted under the Act.

The critical question in this proliferation of information is the integrity of what is being communicated. Here the role of the sports journalist remains essential to analysing and interpreting what is happening in the 'world of sport', and exposing to make transparent the structures of power that lie within it. Contemporary sports journalism is therefore about three interrelated things:

- Adding value to information fans already know;
- Responding to information flows that are fast, virulent and noisy.
- Accepting the role of the sport journalist is to confirm and debunk the information flows that circulate around sport.

CONCLUSION

The relationships between sport and the media are likely to be in a period of flux and dynamic transformation for some time to come. Processes of digitisation, globalisation and commodification will continue to transform media sport in complex and unforeseen ways. As this chapter has illustrated there are, however, some important continuities in what media sport means in society, and how it is produced, distributed and consumed.

The importance and meaning of sport in society for individuals, communities and nations is more often than not communicated through the media and the myriad

networks of the Internet which are increasingly available across different technological devices and mobile applications. The connection between sport as a content for the media has a long history, and arguably the two modern forms of sport and the media as we know and understand them today grew hand in hand from the mid-nineteenth century onward. What is different in contemporary media sport is the scale and scope of sports communications and the diffuse, differentiated nature of its consumption. For example, the Indian Premier League is clearly targeted at a cricket-hungry audience in India, but its global reach and appeal reaches far beyond that, and the television-led commodification of cricket as a sport more broadly is changing the very nature of the sport in how it is played, watched and understood.

Technological change in communications, from print, film, radio, television and the Internet, may well appear at times to be a steady gradual procession of new ways of engaging with sport; of learning about fixtures, results and championships; or analyzing performances, celebrating the achievements of sporting heroes or criticising those who disappoint. Each and every development in technology has appeared to bring us closer to the experience of those who play professional sport, which in turn enriches the lives of many people who support or take a general interest in the ups and downs and ins and outs of sport stars and teams. These are common threads of enhancement to sporting experiences throughout the history of media sport.

However, the technological transformations are uneven, across nations and within them too. Where Internet access is taken for granted in some part of the

world, access to either print or broadcast media in others remains an issue. The 'digital divides' that exist across the globe are evidence of wider information rich and poor societies, and public access to different forms of media sport are part of the barometers of access and literacy associated with modern digital technologies. In the broader scheme of things media sport may seem trivial in comparison to the entitlements for education and health care, but as Hutchins and Rowe (2012: 182) have argued citizen access to popular sport is likely to become a pressing issue in many nations around the world as sports rights move to niche, privatized subscription only channels and online platforms. The 'viewing rights' associated with major events such as Olympic Games or World Cups are therefore key battlegrounds for the future of what we might term 'public media sport'. Digital technology may be enabling more people in more places to access sport, but at a cost.

Nevertheless, digital technology is making profound differences to peoples lives, and that includes the creation of sports content, not only by global, corporate media organisations, but by small-scale, individualised and sometimes politicised 'prosumers' of media sport content: in other words, fans turned producers of media sport through socially networked media. The creative promise of socially networked media is the celebration, investigation and imagination of what sport is and can be for the future. As noted above, the challenge ahead for all those associated with sport, is to help remove the inequalities in access to such creative self-mass communication technologies of sport, a battle over the communications power in sport, to enable a broader

range of engagement with all sports, across all abilities and forms of participation.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Sport and the media are closely associated aspects of popular culture, and for many people media sport is their main point of contact with the sporting world.
- The media are important for producing meanings around sport, including representations of identity.
- Processes of digitalisation, globalisation and commodification are transforming communications, which in turn challenges the conventional practices and consumption of media sport.
- Socially networked media are changing the media relations between sports journalists, sport stars and fans in diverse and profound ways, shifting the communications power relations in and around sport.

Further Reading

The academic research on media sport has grown steadily over the past decade. The increasing influence and impact of digital media and the Internet have motivated researchers to look at how the interrelationships between sport and the media are changing. Recent edited collections have added new insights to these processes including, Brett Hutchins and David Rowe (2013) (eds) *Digital Media Sport: Technology, Power and Culture in the Network Society* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge) and a mainly North American collection edited Andrew Billings and Marie Hardin (eds) (2014) *Routledge Handbook of Sport and New Media* (New York: Routledge). The most recent comprehensive analysis of how established modes of media sport are being transformed by digital media is also by Brett Hutchins and David Rowe (2012) *Sport Beyond Television: The Internet, Digital Media and the Rise of Networked Media Sport* (Abingdon: Routledge).

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Table 1: English Premier League live television broadcast rights 1992 – 2016.

Year	Contract Term	Rights Value £m	Broadcaster
1992	5	191.5	BskyB
1997	4	670	BskyB
2001	3	1,100	BskyB
2004	3	1,024	BskyB
2007	3	1,702	BSkyB/Setanta
2010	3	1,782	BSkyB/ESPN
2013	3	3,038	BSkyB/BT

Source: English Premier League

Table 2: Foreign investors in English Premier League Clubs 2013-14 Season

Club	Foreign Investor(s)	Year
Arsenal	Stan Kroenke (USA)	2011
Chelsea	Roman Abramovich (Russia)	2003
Man United	Malcolm Glazer (USA)	2005
Man City	Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan (Abu Dhabi)	2008
Liverpool	Fenway Sports Group (USA)	2010
Aston Villa	Randy Lerner (USA)	2006
Southampton	The estate of Markus Liebherr (Switzerland)	2009
Sunderland	Ellis Short (USA)	2008
Cardiff City	Vincent Tan (Malaysia)	2010
Fulham	Shahid Khan (USA)	2013

Source: BBC (2013)

Table 3: Export of TV rights to the English Premier League 2010 to 2016

TV Region	2010-13 £m	2013-16 £m	Increase %
United States	42	157	273.8
Americas	21	80	280
Sub-Saharan Africa	170	205	20.5
Scandinavia	111	160	44.1
China	31	38	22.5
India	28	91	225
Singapore	190	190	Nil
Hong Kong	146	146	Nil
Middle East and N. Africa	225	400 (est)	
S Korea	30	32	6.6
Japan	22	30	36
Thailand	38	202	432
Vietnam	6	22	267
Burma	0.2	25	12,400
Indonesia	25	50	100
Malaysia	65	139	114

Source: *Daily Mail* (2013)